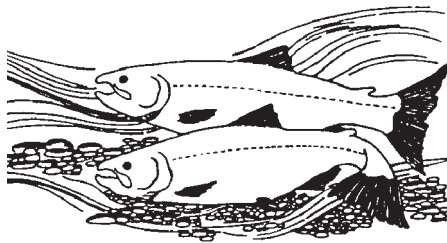


Clark County, Washington **Endangered Species Act** Information

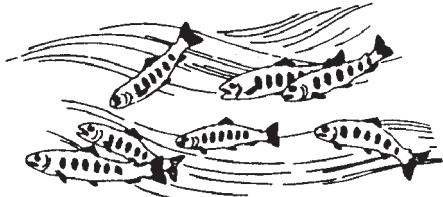
Life cycle of the salmon*

The six species of Pacific salmon spend most of their lives at sea but spawn in freshwater in the rivers of their birth. They swim upstream, often traversing hundreds of miles to small waterways. The female uses her body to dig a depression in the gravel,

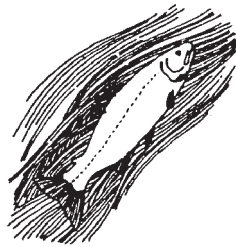


where she lays her eggs while a male hovers at her side to fertilize them. She then moves upstream and flaps her tail against the stream bottom, covering the eggs with a protective layer of gravel. The eggs incubate in this nest, known as a redd, where they depend on the flow of water through the spaces between the rocks to carry vital oxygen to developing embryos.

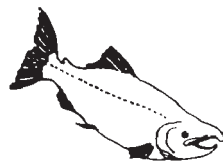
After a couple of months, the fry swim up through the gravel and begin to feed on small aquatic insects. Salmon prefer water colder than 60 degrees. After a period ranging from a few days (in the case of pink and chum salmon) to as much as a year and a half (in the case of steelhead and coho), the fingerlings swim



downstream to the ocean, where they spend between one and five years



migrating and feeding across thousands of miles of open water before returning to their home rivers to spawn. The salmon's ability to find



their birth streams was long a mystery. Although their ability to find their way to the mouths of the rivers is still not fully understood, we know that their sense of smell guides them once they enter freshwater.

Because salmon return to their native streams to reproduce, they divide naturally into distinct populations that rarely interbreed with their neighbors. Each population or "stock" adapts to the conditions of its home river. The salmon's sense of direction is not perfect, however, and some fish do stray from one river system to the next, enabling surrounding healthy populations to recolonize streams where the salmon runs have been extinguished. Straying behavior, plus other factors including life history, geography, the geology of home streams, and genetics, is involved in the designation of evolutionarily significant units by regulators apply-

ing the Endangered Species Act. For instance, the coastal rivers from the mouth of the Columbia River south to Santa Cruz, California, are divided into four such units and the rivers of the Columbia Basin into five.

For information about salmon recovery in Clark County, contact the Clark County Endangered Species Program at (360) 397-2022, or visit www.saveoursalmon.com.

** This text was taken from Salmon Nation: People and Fish at the Edge, published by Ecotrust in Portland, Oregon, and excerpted with their permission. See www.ecotrust.org.*



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